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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000625

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: FORMER GOT MINISTER ERDAL INONU PREDICTS AN
INCREASINGLY WESTERN-ORIENTED TURKEY

REF: ISTANBUL 419

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Erdal Inonu, son of Turkey's second President and himself a former deputy prime minister, predicts Turkey will continue the project of westernization begun under Ataturk. Despite the current Islamic-oriented governing party, he predicts Turks will continue toward a progressive society that sharpens Ataturk's vision of Turkey as a part of Europe and close to the United States. He cautioned against confusing the demands of Islam and Christianity on government, predicted the Justice and Development Party (AKP) had one more term in office -- not long enough to damage the secular state -- and joined others in concluding that Turkish Land Forces Commander Buyukanit would become Chief of the Turkish Joint Staff later this year in his expected rotation. End summary.

GOING FOR EU ACCESSION -- AN AKP CONTRADICTION?

¶2. (C) Former Social Democratic People's Party leader (SHP) and Deputy Prime Minister Erdal Inonu recently commented to us on the range of issues facing Turkey. Stating that Prime Minister Erdogan's AKP was "clearly motivated" by Islamic principles, Inonu felt the government's concerted push to gain EU accession was motivated in part by the desire to marginalize Turkey's military, a watch dog for maintenance of Turkey's secular state. Prime Minister Erdogan and his strategists reasoned that an early and effective move toward EU accession would essentially block a military take over in Turkey. This, they reasoned, would give AKP a freer hand to make religiously-inspired legal changes to erode the secular state. Inonu judged that to date the approach has failed and brought no meaningful changes to law or practice in Turkey. Inonu said that according to his read, Turkish society as a whole favors strengthening its western orientation rather than regressing to pre-republican norms in key areas of public life.

¶3. (C) Describing democracy as a natural ally of westernization, Inonu noted that Ataturk had had to "force march" modernization on the early republic, but that the country was now moving democratically toward the modern state Ataturk envisioned. Thought unwilling to "guarantee it," he was certain a western-oriented Turkey was ever closer to reality. Even a religiously-conservative party like AKP supported the EU process, albeit for its own reasons. Inonu predicted Erdogan would carry his party to victory in the next general election but not beyond. Having tried to begin an institutionalization of religion in public life, particularly through key appointments, in the end, the AKP would run out of time before they could change the secular

impulse.

¶4. (C) On the tense relations between the AKP government and the military, Inonu said that the bungled indictment in March against Land Forces Commander General Yasar Buyukanit was meant to derail his appointment as Chief of the General Staff. But according to Inonu, public reaction was swift and hostile to the government. He was confident Buyukanit would be named to the position. While Inonu recalled two other times of political pressure on the TGS Chief, the government's apparent attempt to bump Buykanit from line via judicial accusations was unprecedented in the republic's history.

CALL FOR REFORMATION

¶5. (SBU) Inonu explained a key difference between Islam and Christianity respecting the state. A Christian leader, he said, could invoke the name of God in a public speech without stirring fears of a fundamentalist conspiracy or subversion. But rather than simply setting a moral tone for society, as in the west, he claimed that Islam mandates principles regulating government and imposes strict and formal guidelines for the state to follow, including sharia law. This is why when Prime Minister Erdogan began a speech recently in Sudan with, "In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent and Most Merciful," some secular Turks were upset.

¶6. (SBU) Inonu also said Islam was in need of reformation, something we have heard from numerous contacts in academia, the religious community and elsewhere. Inonu claimed Ataturk introduced a limited religious reform action. He was able to

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force new rules on state and society because the religious establishment had cooperated with Turkey's enemies. There was no choice but for Ataturk to impose reforms that modified certain religious practices in Turkey. But Turkey -- and Islam -- today still need theological reform in order to enter the modern era. Inonu saw hopeful signs, citing changes in the practice of women who attend funerals. After a group of women stood beside men at a funeral in Izmir a couple of years ago, the matter had been debated in Turkey. In the end, agreement was reached to change received practice -- despite opposition -- and women now stand side by side with men at funerals.

¶7. (C) Comment. Inonu and his views represent the epitome of the westernized Istanbul elite. AKP's army of volunteers in Istanbul notwithstanding (reftel), there is a strong sense of modernity and appreciation for western culture among professionals and the young people that flood the city center every day for work, entertainment and shopping. Inonu clearly has the pulse of this segment of Istanbul society. His views are not shared in conservative parts of the city, however. End comment.

¶8. (SBU) Bio Note. Born June 6, 1926, Inonu received a PhD in physics from California Institute of Technology, but entered politics from academia in the 1980s after the military take-over temporarily sidelined traditional parties and their leaders. Friends of his father's persuaded him to form the Social Democratic People's Party in 1983 in order to carry on the politics and traditions of the temporarily banned Republican People's Party of Ataturk. He agreed at the outset for a period of five years but ended up staying in politics for 13 years, serving as deputy prime minister 1991-1993. Local papers on April 10 indicated Inonu would seek treatment in the United States for leukemia.

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